

# 18 TOP EXPERIENCES



## Bistro Dining, Paris

**1** The latest buzzword in the capital is *néo-bistro* (new bistro), a small, casual address serving outstanding cuisine under the tutelage of a talented (and often 'name') chef. Take Christian Constant's Les Cocottes (p112), a stone's throw from the Eiffel Tower, or Jadis (p111), hidden on a little-known street in middle-of-nowhere 15e. Tables are jammed as tight as ever, dishes of the day are still chalked on the blackboard, and cuisine is just as simple except for one new ingredient – a creative twist. Bistro Le Comptoir du Relais (p110), above

## Eiffel Tower

**2** Seven million people visit it annually but few disagree each visit is unique. From an evening ascent amid twinkling lights to lunch at 58 Tour Eiffel (p112) in the company of a staggering city panorama, there are 101 ways to 'do' it. Pedal beneath it, skip the lift and hike up, buy a crêpe from a stand here or a key ring from the street, snap yourself in front of it, visit it at night or – our favourite – on the odd special occasion when all 324m of the tower glows a different colour.

JAN STROMME



## Mont St-Michel

**3** The dramatic play of tides on this abbey-island in Normandy is magical and mysterious. Said by Celtic mythology to be a sea tomb to which souls of the dead were sent, Mont St-Michel (p227) is rich in legend and history, keenly felt as you make your way barefoot across rippled sand to the stunning architectural ensemble. Walk around it alone or, better still, hook up with a guide in nearby Genêts for a dramatic day hike across the bay.



GREG ELIAS



ELLIOT DANIEL

## Champagne

**4** Name-brand Champagne houses like Mumm, Mercier and Moët & Chandon in the main towns of Reims and Épernay, are known the world over. But – our tip – much of Champagne's best liquid gold is made by almost 5000 small-scale *vignerons* (winegrowers) in 320-odd villages. Dozens of *maisons* (Champagne houses) welcome visitors for a taste, tipple and shopping at producer prices, rendering the region's scenic driving routes (p286) the best way to taste fine bubbly amid rolling vineyards and drop-dead-gorgeous villages. Our favourite: tasting in Le Mesnil-sur-Oger and lunch at Le Mesnil (p289).



NEIL SETON/FIELD

## Loire Valley Châteaux

**5** If it's aristocratic pomp and architectural splendour you're after, this regal valley is the place to linger. Flowing for over 1000km into the Atlantic Ocean, the Loire is one of France's last *fleuves sauvages* (wild rivers) and its banks are a 1000-year snapshot of French high society. The valley is riddled with beautiful châteaux sporting glittering turrets and ballrooms, lavish cupolas and chapels. If you're a hopeless romantic seeking the perfect fairy-tale castle, head for moat-ringed Azay-le-Rideau (p376), Villandry and its gardens (left; p374), and less-visited Beauregard (p364).



CHRISTIAN ASLUND

## Adrenalin Kick, Chamonix

**6** Sure, 007 did it, but so can you: the Vallée Blanche (p469) is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. You won't regret the €70-odd it costs to do the more than 20km off-piste descent from the spike of the Aiguille du Midi to mountaineering mecca Chamonix – every minute of the five hours it takes to get down will pump more adrenalin in your body than anything else you've ever done. Craving more? Hurl yourself down Europe's longest black run, La Sarenne, at Alpe d'Huez (p504).



## Ste-Chapelle & Chartres

**7** This is a top experience reserved strictly for sunny days and those who like looking at the world through rose-coloured glass. Be stunned and inspired by the sublime stained glass in Paris' Ste-Chapelle (p65), one of Christendom's most beautiful places of worship. Then head out of town to Chartres, where you can't get bluer blue than the awesome stained-glass windows of Cathédrale Notre Dame de Chartres (below; p149). Leave with the true blue of so-called 'Chartres blue' firmly imprinted in your mind.



PHOTOGRAPH BY JONAS

## Dune du Pilat

**8** The Dune du Pilat (p630) is a 'mountain' that just has to be climbed. Not only is the coastal panorama from the top of Europe's largest sand dune a stunner – it takes in the Banc d'Arguin bird reserve and Cap Ferret across the bay – but the nearby beaches have some of the Atlantic Coast's best surf. Cycle here from Arcachon and top off the heady trip with a dozen oysters, shucked before your very eyes and accompanied by *crepinettes* (local sausages).



ANDREW BAIN

## The Three Corniches, Nice

**9** It is impossible to drive this dramatic trio of coastal roads (p856), each one higher and more hairpin bend-riddled than the next, without conjuring up cinematic images of Grace Kelly, Hitchcock, the glitz of Monaco high life, and scandalous royals – all to the standing ovation of big view after big view of sweeping blue sea fringing Europe's most mythical coastline. To make a perfect day out of it, before leaving Nice, shop for a picnic at the morning market on Cours Saleya (p821).



## Carcassonne at Dusk

**10** That first glimpse of La Cité's sturdy, stone, witch's-hat turrets above Carcassonne (p727) in the Languedoc is enough to make your hair stand on end. To properly savour this fairy-tale walled city, linger at dusk after the crowds have left, when the old town belongs to its 100 or so inhabitants and the few visitors staying at the handful of lovely hotels within its ramparts. Don't forget to look back when you leave to view the old city, beautifully illuminated, glowing in the warm night.

GLENN BEANLAND



## D-Day Beaches

**11** This is one of France's most emotional journeys. The broad stretches of fine sand and breeze-blown bluffs are quiet now, but early on 6 June 1944 the beaches of northern Normandy (p209) were a cacophony of gunfire and explosions, the bodies of Allied soldiers lying in the sand as their comrades-in-arms charged inland. Just up the hill from Omaha Beach, the long rows of symmetrical gravestones at the Normandy American Cemetery & Memorial bear solemn, silent testimony to the horrible price paid for France's liberation from Nazi tyranny. Gun bunker, Omaha Beach, left

DENNIS JOHNSON



## Pont du Gard

**12** This Unesco World Heritage Site (p712) near Nîmes in southern France is gargantuan: 35 arches straddle the Roman aqueduct's 275m-long upper tier, containing a watercourse that was designed to carry 20,000 cu metres of water per day. View it from afloat a canoe on the River Gard or pay extra to jig across its top tier. Oh, and don't forget your swimming gear for a spot of post-Pont, daredevil dives and high jumps from the rocks nearby – a plunge that will entice the most reluctant of young historians.



GLENN BEANLAND



GLENN BEANLAND

## Provençal Markets

**13** No region is more of a market-must than this one. Be it fresh fish by the port in seafaring Marseille, early summer's strings of pink garlic, melons from Cavaillon all summer long or winter-time's earthy 'black diamond' truffles, Provence thrives on a bounty of fresh produce – grown locally and piled high each morning at the market. Every town and village has one, but those in Carpentras and Aix-en-Provence (left) are the best known. While you're here, stock up on dried herbs, green and black olives marinated a dozen different ways, courgette flowers and oils.





## Hilltop Villages

**14** Impossibly perched on a rocky peak above the Mediterranean, gloriously lost in back country, fortified or château-topped... southern France's portfolio of *villages perchés* is vast, impressive and calls for go-slow touring – on foot, by bicycle or car. Most villages are medieval, built from gold stone and riddled with cobbled lanes, flower-filled alleys and hidden squares silent but for the glug of a fountain. Combine a village visit with lunch alfresco – La Table de Ventabren (p776) and Les Deux Frères (p857) are two dreamy addresses – and you'll never want to leave.

View from Èze hilltop village, above



HERMEL/AMY

## Lyonnais Bouchons

**15** The red-and-white checked tablecloths, closely packed tables and decades-old bistro decor could be anywhere in France. It's the local cuisine that makes *bouchons* in Lyon (p448) unique, plus the quaint culinary customs, like totting up the bill on the paper tablecloth, or serving wine in a glass bottle wrapped with an elastic band to stop drips, or the 'shut weekends' opening hours. Various piggy parts drive Lyonnais cuisine but, have faith, this French city is said to be the gastronomic capital of France. Dine and decide. Chez Paul *bouchon*, above



## Centre Pompidou-Metz

**16** Bright white by day, all aglow after dark, this new star of the northern France art scene is on the tip of everyone's tongue. A provincial cousin to the well-known Centre Pompidou in Paris, this modern art museum (p339) was designed by a world-class, Japanese–French duo of architects and is as much architectural gem as exhibition powerhouse, easily on a par with Bilbao's Guggenheim and London's Tate. Part of the experience is a designer lunch, aka edible art on a plate, at the museum's La Voile Blanche (p343).



JOHN ELK III

## Carnac Megaliths

**17** Pedalling past open fields dotted with the world's greatest concentration of mysterious megaliths gives a poignant reminder of Brittany's ancient human inhabitation. No one knows for sure what inspired these gigantic menhirs, dolmens, cromlechs, tumuli and cairns to be built – a sun god? Some phallic fertility cult? You decide. To top off the Breton experience, stop for crêpes and cider at Crêperie au Pres-soir (p265), a traditional long house in Carnac set amid a circle of menhirs.

## Alsatian Wine Route

**18** It is one of France's most popular drives – and for good reason. Motoring in this far northeast corner of France takes you through a kaleidoscope of lush green vines, perched castles and gentle mist-covered mountains. The only pit stops en route are half-timbered villages and roadside wine cellars, where fruity Alsace vintages can be swirled, tasted and bought. To be truly wooed, drive the Route des Vins d'Alsace (p316) in autumn, when vines are heavy with grapes waiting to be harvested and colours are at their vibrant best.

BARBARA VAN ZANTEN



# welcome to France

*... a country that seduces travellers with its unfalteringly familiar culture woven around café terraces, village-square markets and lace-curtained bistros with their plat du jour (dish of the day) chalked on the board*

## Cultural Savoir-Faire

France is all about world-class art and architecture, Roman temples and Renaissance châteaux, iconic landmarks known the world over, and rising stars few yet know. Stroll the lily-clad gardens Monet painted and savour *un café* at the Parisian café where Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir met to philosophise. See glorious pasts blaze forth and imagine the life of a French king at bourgeois Versailles. View tomorrow's art starts in squats secreted in abandoned 19th-century Haussmann mansions in Paris, or at new headline-grabbing museums up north. Drink cocktails in a shabby-chic Nantes warehouse. Listen to Marseille rap and Parisian jazz. Sense the subtle infusion of language, music and mythology in Brittany, brought by 5th-century Celtic invaders. Yes, French culture offers never-ending possibilities to fill any stay in France.

## Gastronomic Art de Vivre

Or perhaps it is the French feast of fine food and wine that woos so many travellers. (This is, after all, the country that entices more than any other: more than 80 million visitors a year, ranking it the world's top tourist destination. But know that gastronomic France goes far deeper than Parisian bistro dining, long lunches outside, shopping for fruit and veg at the market and wolfing down croissants hot from the *boulangerie* (bakery) for breakfast. Learn how to make petits fours with the kids in Paris or flip crêpes in Brittany; taste wine with one of the world's top sommeliers in Bordeaux; visit an Atlantic Coast oyster farm; drink Champagne in ancient cellars in Reims; tour a Provençal melon farm; harvest olives, peaches and cherries in the hot south... and understand that food is as much an *art de vivre* (art of living) for the French as an essential to survive.

## Lyrical Landscape

Then there is the *terroir* (land) and the startlingly varied journey it weaves from northern France's cliffs and sand dunes to the bright-blue sea of the French Riviera and Corsica's green oak forests. Outdoor action is what this lyrical landscape calls for, be it fast-paced and pulse-racing, slow and relaxed, solo or *en famille*. Walk barefoot across wave-rippled sand to Mont St-Michel; ride the cable car to mind-blowing glacial panoramas above mountaineering mecca Chamonix; cartwheel down Europe's highest sand dune; surf in Biarritz; ski the Alps; hike from one extinct volcano to another in the Massif Central; float between locks or pedal the towpath along the Canal du Midi. The action is endless and the next adventure just begging to be had.

# need to know

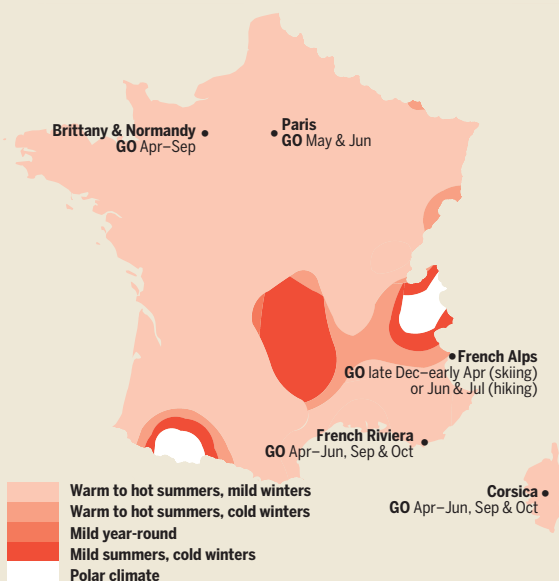
## Currency

» Euro (€)

## Language

» French

## When to Go



### High Season

(Jul & Aug)

- » Queues at big sights and on the road, especially August
- » Christmas, New Year and Easter equally busy
- » Late December to March is high season in French Alpine ski resorts

### Shoulder

(Apr–Jun & Sep)

- » Accommodation rates drop in southern France and other hot spots
- » Spring: warm weather, flowers, local produce
- » The *vendange* (grape harvest) is reason to visit in Autumn

### Low Season

(Oct–Mar)

- » Prices up to 50% less than high season
- » Sightings, attractions and restaurants open fewer days and shorter hours

## Your Daily Budget

### Budget up to

**€100**

- » Dorm bed: €15–€40
- » Double room in a budget hotel: €50–€70
- » Free admission to many attractions first Sunday of month
- » Set lunches: €10–€15

### Midrange

**€100–€200**

- » Double room in a midrange hotel: €70–€175
- » Lunch *menus* (set meals) in gourmet restaurants: €20–€40

### Top end over

**€200**

- » Double room in a top-end hotel: €70–€175
- » Lower weekend rates in business hotels
- » Top restaurant dinner: *menu* €50, *à la carte* €100–€150



## Money

» ATMs at every airport, most train stations and every second street corner in towns and cities. Visa, MasterCard and Amex widely accepted.

## Visas

» Generally not required for stays of up to 90 days (or at all for EU nationals); some nationalities need a Schengen visa (p969).

## Mobile Phones

» European and Australian phones work. Slip in a French SIM card to call with a cheaper French number.

## Driving

» Drive on the right; steering wheel is on the left side of the car. Be aware of the potentially hazardous 'priority to the right' rule (p979).

## Websites

» **France Guide** ([www.franceguide.com](http://www.franceguide.com))  
French government tourist office website

» **French Word-a-Day** (<http://french-word-a-day.typepad.com>)  
Fun language learning

» **Lonely Planet** ([www.lonelyplanet.com/france](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/france))  
Destination information, hotel bookings, traveller forum and more

» **Voyages SNCF** ([www.voyages-sncf.com](http://www.voyages-sncf.com)) French railways

» **France.fr** ([www.france.fr](http://www.france.fr)) The definitive portal on France

## Exchange Rates

<b>Australia</b>	A\$1	€0.71
<b>Canada</b>	C\$1	€0.72
<b>Japan</b>	¥100	€0.88
<b>NZ</b>	NZ\$1	€0.55
<b>UK</b>	UK£1	€1.17
<b>US</b>	US\$1	€0.75

For current exchange rates see [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com)

## Important Numbers

<b>France country code</b>	☎33
<b>International access code</b>	☎00
<b>Europe-wide emergency</b>	☎112
<b>Ambulance (SAMU)</b>	☎15
<b>Police</b>	☎17

## Arriving in France

» **Aéroport Roissy Charles de Gaulle** (p130)

Trains, buses and RER – to Paris centre every 15 to 30 minutes, 5.30am to midnight.  
Night bus – hourly, 12.30am to 5.30am.  
Taxis – €45–€60; 30 minutes to Paris centre.

» **Aéroport d'Orly** (p130)

Buses and Orlyval rail – at least every 15 minutes, 6am to 11.30pm.  
Night bus – hourly, 12.30am to 5.30am.  
Taxis – €35–€50; 25 minutes to Paris centre.

## In France to Shop!

OK, so Paris is the bees knees for luxury goods like haute-couture, high-quality fashion accessories (a Hermès silk scarf, Madame?), lingerie, perfume and cosmetics. Lovely as they are, they most probably aren't any cheaper to buy in France than at home.

Time your trip right and pick up designer and street fashion for a snip of the usual price at France's sales (*soldes*), by law held twice a year for three weeks in January and again in July. Other times look for the words *degriffés* (name-brand products with the labels cut out), *bonnes affaires* (cut-price deals) and *dépôt-vente* (secondhand). Find fab factory-outlet shops in Troyes (p298) and Calais (p167).

# what's new

## Supper Clubs

**1** The trend of dining *à la maison* (at home) has swept Paris gourmets and socialites off their feet – the crème de la crème take you out to dinner at the latest ‘in’ addresses (p42).

## Canal St-Martin, Paris

**2** The shaded towpaths of this tranquil canal in Paris’ eastern suburbs have undergone a real urban renaissance – enter one of the capital’s hippest areas to drink, dine, stroll and picnic (p88 and p115)

## Jadis, L’Agrume & Derrière, Paris

**3** This hot trio is among a flurry of top-drawer, casually understated dining spaces to recently woo the capital. Even big-name chefs like Christian Constant and William Ledeuil are at it (p105).

## Centre Pompidou-Metz

**4** The space-age curves of Metz’ gleaming white modern-art museum, sudden architectural star of the provincial north, is as much a show-stopper as its Parisian big brother (p339).

## L’Aventure Michelin, Clermont-Ferrand

**5** Now this is apt: the French tyre company that does so much more than rings of rubber finally tells its tale at this museum – travel has always been a big theme (p524).

## Rue Le Bec, Lyon

**6** Lyon’s most creative chef proves he’s still on top with his latest ground-breaking venture – a wholly affordable, market-style dining space on the Confluence aka rejuvenated industrial wasteland (p447).

*For this new edition of France, our authors have hunted down the fresh, the revamped, the transformed, the hot and the happening. Here are a few of our favourites. For up-to-the-minute reviews and recommendations, see [lonelyplanet.com/france](http://lonelyplanet.com/france).*

## Brive-Vallée de la Dordogne Airport

**7** Our authors have all bases covered, including France’s latest regional airport to open with budget flights between the Dordogne, Paris and London (p560).

## Jean Nouvel in Sarlat-la-Canéda

**8** Architect of Paris’ Arab World Institute and Musée du Quai Branly is at it again, this time with a panoramic lift inside a village-church-turned-market in the Dordogne (p569).

## Gorge Floating

**9** Squeeze into a wetsuit, strap a buoyancy bag to your back and float between rocks on green water – this is the new big thrill of Provence’s Gorges du Verdon (p814).

## French Riviera Glamour

**10** Hôtel Ermitage is the latest hip hotel to swing onto the scene in St-Tropez. It’s hot, it’s edgy, it’s a 1950s-design must-stay that the celebs love (p850).

## Mesdames Messieurs, Montpellier

**11** Natural and organic wines are increasingly popular in France, as are Languedoc’s sun-blessed vintages. Taste both at this brand new wine bar in the south’s snappiest student city (p720).

## Cité Internationale de la Dentelle et de la Mode, Calais

**12** Victorian-era machinery clatters and clanks in Calais to turn thread into lace at this port city’s newest museum – lace is what made Calais a big name in textiles (p165).

# if you like...



## Fabulous Food

Gourmet appetites know no bounds in France, paradise for food lovers with its varied cuisine, markets and local gusto for dining well. Go to Burgundy for hearty wine-based cooking, Brittany and the Atlantic Coast for seafood and Basque Country for a slice of Spanish spice.

**Parisian bistros** Capital dining embraces everything from checked-tablecloth tradition to contemporary minimalism (p105)

**Lyon** Eating local in France's gastronomic heart means piggy cuisine in a *bouchon* (p448)

**Truffles** Go to Provence (p753) and the Dordogne (p568) to try this earthy, ink-black delicacy

**Oyster farms** Sink oysters fresh from their beds around Arcachon (p628) and Bordeaux (p621) or Breton oyster capital Cancale (p242)

**Basque tapas** Proof of just how wildly varied French cuisine is – taste it in Bayonne (p640) or on the seashore (p648)

**Bouillabaisse** Marseille's mighty meal of fish stew (p767)

**Munster** Tasting, dairy tours and farmstays around this pungent, creamy cheese (p329)

## Gorgeous Villages

There is no simpler French pleasure than meandering around quaint villages of gold stone, pink granite, or whitewashed Basque-style. Cobbled lanes twist and turn to sculpted fountains, hidden squares and shuttered houses strung with purple wisteria, vines or drying peppers.

**Péruges** Day trip it from Lyon for cider and sugar-crusted *galettes* between yellow-gold medieval stone (p456)

**St-Émilion** A medieval village perched dramatically above a sea of vines in Bordeaux (p624)

**St-Jean Pied de Port** An ancient pilgrim outpost en route to Santiago de Compostela, Spain (p655)

**Yvoire** Château-clad on the southern shore of Lake Geneva, this flowery Savoy village is a privileged address (p480)

**The Luberon** This part of Provence is lavishly strewn with drop-dead gorgeous hilltop villages (p805)

**Èze** Fuses a stunning hilltop village with a sweeping Riviera panorama – wow! (p857)

**The Dordogne** Beautiful *bastides* (fortified towns) at every turn (p563)

## Wine Tasting

Be it by tasting in cellars, watching grape harvests or sleeping *au château*, France's wine culture requires immediate road-testing.

**Bistrot du Sommelier** Food and wine are matched by one of the world's foremost sommeliers at this Parisian bistro (p113)

**Bordeaux** The Medoc, St-Émilion and Cognac set connoisseurs' hearts a-flutter in this wine-rich region (p619)

**Burgundy** Sample renowned vintages in Beaune (p404) and the Côte d'Or (p401)

**Châteauneuf-du-Pape** Vines planted by 14th-century popes yield southern France's most illustrious red (p796)

**Alsace wine route** Driving trails in northern France (p316)

**Vin Jaune** Something different: liquid gold in the Jura (p515 and p514)

**Bandol and Cassis** Wine tasting in these two Riviera villages is as much about the majestic Med setting as the wonderful wine (p855 and p771)

**Musée de la Vigne et du Vin** Champagne-making traditions are the focus of this essential-stop museum (and great lunch address) in Le Mesnil-sur-Oger (p289)



» Bread for sale at a marketplace in Ajaccio, Corsica



VERONICA GARBUIT

## Castles

The Loire Valley is the first stop for anyone with a penchant for French châteaux dripping in period gold leaf. But venture elsewhere and you'll be surprised what other delights lie behind lumbering stone walls.

**Versailles** It has to be done: the country's largest, grandest château and palace, a stone's throw from Paris (p145)

**Chambord** A treasure of a Renaissance country-getaway castle, where French kings and queens played, hunted and had a ball (p361)

**Azay-le-Rideau** Conjure up a classic French château with moat, turrets and sweeping staircase and voila, it's Azay (p376)

**Villandry** The formal French gardens framing this Renaissance Loire Valley château are glorious (p374)

**Château des Ducs de Bretagne** Enter Nantes and one of the finest collections of French paintings outside Paris (p597)

**Château Grimaldi** Bijou 12th-century sea-facing castle-turned-studio and former home of artist Picasso (p835)

**Cathar Fortresses** Now ruined, these dramatic hilltop castles sizzling in the heat evoke 13th-century persecution (p748)

## Coastal Paths

From pearly white cliff to fiery red rock, tiny pebble-strewn fishing cove to seemingly endless paradise sand, France's coastline has it all. Get up close with one of France's many *sentiers du littoral* (coastal footpaths) – often times windswept, other times scented with salty air and wild herbal scrub.

**St-Tropez** This *sentier du littoral* leads from mythical fishing cove to celebrity-laced sands (p855)

**Bandol** Stride the coast between inland vines and waterfront rock formations (p855)

**Chemin de Nietzsche** Spectacular and steep rocky footpath near Nice, place of reflection for the German philosopher to whom it pays homage (p857)

**Corsica** Hike from Italianate Bonifacio to a lighthouse (p889), or past Genoese watchtowers along Cap Corse's rugged Customs Officers' Trail (p874)

**GR21** Trace the Norman coast to Le Havre (p200), or see opal blues along northern France's **GR120** (p168)

**Belle Île and Île d'Ouessant** A Breton island twinset with coastal walking trails (p267 and p254)

## Markets

Art nouveau hangar, stall-packed street, plane-tree-shaded village square...

French markets spill across an enticing mix of public spaces. Every town, village and hamlet has one – usually mornings and at least once or twice a week. Take your own bag or basket.

**Lyonnais markets** Les Halles and Croix Rousse are Lyon's two buxom market divas, endowed with stalls selling fruit, veg, meat, charcuterie and runny St Marcellin cheese (p450)

**Place des Lices** No town square is as celebrity-famous or jam-packed with Provençal market stalls as St-Tropez's (p851)

**Marché des Capucins** Enjoy oysters and white wine at this Saturday-morning market in Bordeaux (p622)

**Marché Couvert** Once a bishop's palace, now a temple to fresh local produce in Metz (p343)

**Uzès** Languedoc's most splendid farmers market fills colonnaded, cobbled place aux Herbes (p713)

**If you like... dramatic driving**, the trio of hairpin-laced corniches (coastal roads) near Nice are sure to thrill (p856)



## Islands & Beaches

The country's 3200km-long coastline morphs from white chalk cliffs (Normandy) to treacherous promontories (Brittany) to broad expanses of fine sand (Atlantic Coast) and pebbly or sandy beaches (Mediterranean Coast).

**Île de Porquerolles and Île de Port-Cros** France's only marine national park and a pedestrian paradise fringed with near-tropical beaches (p853)

**Plage de Pampelonne** Stars love this hip beach in St-Tropez, darling, and for good reason – it's glam and golden (p849)

**Île de Ré** This Paris-chic favourite is criss-crossed with cycling trails (p613)

**Belle Île** Its name means 'Beautiful Island' and that is just what this island off the coast of Brittany is (p267)

**Corsica** Plage de Palombaggia and Plage de Santa Giulia near Porto Vecchio are to die for (p891)

**Les Landes** Find this surfer's secret, backed by dunes, on the Atlantic Coast (p644)

**Côte d'Opale** Ramble along rousing, wind-buffed beaches across from the white cliffs of Dover (p168)

## Incredible Train Journeys

There is nothing quite like watching France's kaleidoscope of soaring mountains, rolling valleys, wild gorges and meandering rivers jog past from aboard an old-fashioned steam train or mountain railway.

**Tramway du Mont Blanc** Travel in the shade of Europe's biggest mountain by hopping aboard France's highest train, in Megève (p477)

**Chemin de Fer de la Mure** Spot marmots between tunnels and viaducts in France's largest national park (p502)

**The Trembler** Few coastal train journeys are as fabulous as Corsica's Tramway de la Balagne (p879)

**The Canary** Take in mind-blowing Pyrenean scenery from aboard a mountain train in Roussillon (p749)

**Pine Cone Train** Provençal hilltop villages peep down at passengers aboard this narrow-gauge railway from Nice (p826)

**Chemin de Fer du Touristique du Haut-Quercy** See the Lot by steam train (p593)

**La Vapeur du Trieux** Journey riverside from Breton harbour to an artists' village (p246)

## Great Outdoors

With six wildlife-rich national parks and many more protected areas, the French landscape begs outdoor action. Mountainous areas like the Alps and Pyrenees offer a gamut of activities, but countrywide there's plenty more to choose from. *Allez!*

**White-water sports** Favourite gorges to ride wild waters: Gorges de l'Ardeche (p459), Gorges de l'Allier (p544) and Gorges du Verdon (p813)

**Corsica** Bonifacio diving, Porto hiking, boat trips everywhere – this island is one big outdoor fest (p867)

**The Stevenson trail** Hike with or without a donkey through Languedoc's hot, wild Cévennes (p735)

**Gliding** Float above the most staggering landscapes in the Auvergne (extinct volcanoes; p531), Chamonix (French Alps; p471), Brittany (p255) and Massif des Vosges (p329)

**Vallée Blanche** Chamonix's world-class, off-piste ski trail (p469)

**Mountain biking** Knuckle-whitening descents in Morzine (p478), Alpe d'Huez (p504) and Cauterets (p674) keep bikers on their toes

# month by month

## Top Events

- 1** Festival d'Avignon, July
- 2** Fête du Citron, February
- 3** Fête des Lumières, December
- 4** Fêtes d'Arvor, August
- 5** Cannes Film Festival, May

## January

With New Year festivities done and dusted, it's time to play snow bunnies in the Alps. Crowds on the slopes thin out once school's back, but this is still a busy month. On the Mediterranean, mild winters cast a wonderful serenity over a part of France that's mad busy the rest of the year.



### Vive le Ski!

Grab your skis or board and hit the slopes. Resorts in the Alps, Pyrenees and Jura open mid- to late December, but January is the start of the French ski season in earnest. Whether a vast purpose-built station or a lost Alpine village, France has a resort to match every mood and moment. Pick from our pick of the *pistes* on p466.



### Hunting Black Diamonds

No culinary product is more aromatic or decadent than black truffles. Snout them out in the Dordogne (southeastern France; see p568) and Provence (southwestern France; see p753) – the truffle-hunting

season runs late December to March but January is the prime month.

## February

Crisp cold weather in the mountains – lots of china-blue skies now – translates as the ski season in top gear. Alpine resorts get mobbed by families during the February school holidays and accommodation is at its priciest; don't turn up without a reservation.



### Nice Carnival

While northern France shivers, Nice makes the most of its mild Mediterranean climate with this crazy street carnival ([www.nicecarnaval.com](http://www.nicecarnaval.com)), France's largest. As well as the usual parade and costume shenanigans, merrymakers pelt each other with blooms during Carnaval de Nice's legendary flower battles.



### Citrus Celebrations

No surprise that Menton on the French Riviera was once Europe's biggest lemon producer, given its exotic Fête du Citron (p858). These days it ships in a

zillion and one lemons from Spain to sculpt into gargantuan carnival characters.

## March

The tail end of the ski season stays busy thanks to ongoing school holidays (until mid-March) and temperatures that no longer turn lips purple. Down south, the first buds of spring herald the start of the bullfighting season and, depending on the year, *Pâques* (Easter).



### Féria Pascale

No fest sets passions in France's hot south blazing more than this, held each Easter in Arles to open the bullfighting season ([www.feriaarles.com](http://www.feriaarles.com), in French). Four days of street dancing, music, concerts al fresco and bullfighting is what this exuberant event is all about. Not all bulls die (see p782).

## April

Dedicated ski fiends can carve glaciers in the highest French ski



resorts until mid-April. Otherwise, it's off with the ski boots, and on with the hiking gear as peach and almond trees flower pink against a backdrop of snow-capped peaks.



### Counting Sheep

During the centuries-old Fête de la Transhumance in late April or May, shepherds across France walk their flocks of sheep up to lush green summer pastures; St-Rémy de Provence's fest is among the best known. Or head to villages in the Pyrenees (p670) and Massif Central (p536) to see this transit.

## May

As the first melons ripen in Provence and outdoor markets burst forth with new-found colour, there is no lovelier month to travel. Spring is in.



### May Day

No one works on 1 May, a national holiday that incites a real summer buzz with its *muguets* (lilies of the valley) sold at roadside stalls and given to friends as good-luck charms. In Arles, Camargue cowboys show off their bull-herding and equestrian skills at the Fête des Gardians (p782).



### Pèlerinage des Gitans

Roma from all over Europe flock to the Camargue on 24 and 25 May and again in October (nearest Sunday to 22 October) for a flamboyant fiesta of street music, dancing and dipping their toes in the sea (p786; [www.gitans.fr](http://www.gitans.fr), in French).



### Starring at Cannes

In mid-May film stars and celebrities walk the red carpet at Cannes, the biggest of Europe's cinema extravaganzas (p839; [www.festival-cannes.com](http://www.festival-cannes.com)).



### Monaco Grand Prix

How fitting that the most glamorous race of the Formula One season rips around the streets of one of the world's most glam countries (p861; [www.formula1monaco.com](http://www.formula1monaco.com)).

## June

With the onset of midsummer, France's festival pace quickens alongside a rising temperature gauge, which tempts the first bathers into the sea. Looking north, nesting white storks shower bags of good luck on farmsteads in Alsace.



### Fête de la Musique

Orchestras, crooners, buskers and bands fill streets and squares with music during France's vibrant nationwide celebration of music on 21 June ([www.fetedelamusique.culture.fr](http://www.fetedelamusique.culture.fr), in French). Free and fab concerts are particularly abundant in Paris, Lyon, Marseille and other big towns and cities.

## July

If lavender's your French love, this is the month to catch it in flower in Provence. But you won't be the only one. School's out for the summer, showering the country with teems of tourists, traffic and too many **complet (full) signs** strung in hotel windows.



### Tour de France

The world's most prestigious cycling race ends on av des Champs-Élysées in Paris on the third or fourth Sunday of July, but you can catch it for two weeks before all over France – the route changes each year but the French Alps are a hot spot ([www.letour.fr](http://www.letour.fr)).



### Bastille Day

You can join the French in celebrating the storming of the Bastille, 14 July 1789, anywhere really – countrywide there are firework displays, balls, processions, parades and lots of hoo-ha all round.



### Festival d'Avignon

Rouse your inner thespian with Avignon's legendary performing-arts festivals (p791; [www.festival-avignon.com](http://www.festival-avignon.com)). Street acts in its fringe fest are as inspired as those on official stages.



### Nice Jazz Festival

Jive between Roman ruins to jazz cats at this soulful music fest in Nice ([www.nicejazzfest.fr](http://www.nicejazzfest.fr)).

## August

**It's that mad summer month when the French join everyone else on holiday. Paris, Lyon and other big cities empty; traffic jams at motorway toll booths test the patience of a saint; and temperatures soar. Avoid. Or don your party hat and join the mad crowd!**



### Proud to be Breton

The Fêtes d'Arvor is a passionate celebration of Breton culture. Think street parades, concerts and dozens of authentic *festoù-noz* (night festivals) spilling across the half-timbered, cobbled Vannes (p269; [www.fetes-arvor.org](http://www.fetes-arvor.org), in French).



### Celts Unite!

Celtic culture is the focus of the Festival Interceltique de Lorient (p265; [www.festival-interceltique.com](http://www.festival-interceltique.com)), when hundreds of thousands of Celts from Brittany and abroad flock to Lorient to celebrate just that.

## September

**As sun-plump grapes hang heavy on darkened vines and that August madness drops off as abruptly as it began, a welcome tranquility falls**

**across autumnal France. This is the start of France's *vendange* (grape harvest).**



### The Rutting Season

Nothing beats getting up at dawn to watch mating stags, boar and red deer at play. Observatory towers are hidden in woods around Château de Chambord (p361) but when a valley like the Loire is so choc-a-bloc with Renaissance hunting pads, who cares which one?



### Braderie de Lille

The mountains of empty mussel shells engulfing the streets after three days of mussel-munching have to be seen to be believed. Then there's the real reason for visiting Lille the first weekend in September – its huge flea market (p159) is Europe's largest.

## November

**It's nippy now, especially in northern France, where winter is well under way. *Toussaint* (All Saints' Day) on 1 November ushers in the switch to shorter, winter opening hours for many sights and monuments. Lots of restaurants close two nights a week now, making dining out on Monday a real challenge in some towns.**



### Beaujolais Nouveau

At precisely the stroke of midnight on the third Thursday in November the first bottles of cherry-red Beaujolais *nouveau* wine are cracked open – and what a party it can be in Beaujolais, Lyon and other places nearby!

## December

**Days are short and it is cold everywhere bar the south of France. But there are Christmas school holidays and festive celebrations to bolster sun-deprived souls, not to mention some season-opening winter skiing in the highest-altitude Alpine resorts from mid-December.**



### Alsatian Christmas Markets

Meandering between fairy-light-lit craft stalls, mug of *vin chaud* (warm mulled wine) in gloved hand, at Alsace's traditional pre-Christmas markets, exudes cinematic romance.



### Fête des Lumières

France's biggest and best light show, on 8 December, transforms the streets and squares of Lyon into an open stage (p444; [www.lumieres.lyon.fr](http://www.lumieres.lyon.fr)).

# itineraries

*Whether you've got five days or 50, these itineraries provide a starting point for the trip of a lifetime. Want more inspiration? Head online to [lonelyplanet.com/thorntree](http://lonelyplanet.com/thorntree) to chat with other travellers.*



## 10 Days Essential France

No place screams 'France!' more than **Paris**. Spend two days in the capital, allowing for plenty of time between iconic sights to lounge on café terraces, dine in Parisian bistros and take romantic strolls along the Seine and Canal St-Martin (see Paris in Two Days, p46). Day three, enjoy Renaissance royalty at **Château de Chambord** and **Château de Chenonceau** in the Loire. Or skip this fabled valley, which gives such a fabulous nod to French architecture, and spend two days in Normandy instead, marvelling at **Rouen's** Notre Dame cathedral, the **Bayeux Tapestry**, sea-splashed **Mont St-Michel** and – should modern history be your love – the **D-Day landing beaches**.

Day five venture south through the **Bordeaux** wine region, staying overnight in an ecofriendly *chambre d'hôte* in Bordeaux's old wine-merchant quarter and perhaps enrolling in a wine-tasting course at the Maison du Vin de Bordeaux. Then it's a three-hour drive to the walled city of **Carcassonne**, Roman **Nîmes** and the **Pont du Gard**. Finish on the French Riviera with a casino flutter in Grace Kelly's **Monaco**, a portside aperitif in Brigitte Bardot's **St-Tropez** and a stroll around Matisse's **Nice**.



## Two Weeks

### The Atlantic to the Med

Step off the boat in **Calais** and be seduced by 40km of cliffs, sand dunes and windy beaches on the spectacular **Côte d'Opale**. Speed southwest, taking in a fish lunch in **Dieppe**, a cathedral stop in **Rouen**, or a picturesque cliffside picnic in **Étretat** en route to your overnight stop: the pretty Normandy seaside resorts of **Honfleur**, **Deauville** or **Trouville**. Spend two days here exploring.

Devote day three to the **D-Day landing beaches** and the fourth day to **Mont St-Michel** and its beautiful bay – hiking barefoot across the sands here is exhilarating. End the week in Brittany with a flop in an old-fashioned beach tent in **Dinard** and a bracing stroll on spectacular headlands around **Camaret-sur-Mer**.

Week two begins with a long drive south to chic **La Rochelle** for its lavish seafood. Spend a night here, continuing the gourmet theme as you wend south through Médoc wine country to **Bordeaux**. Next morning, stop in **Toulouse** and/or **Carcassonne** before hitting the Med. **The Camargue** – a wetland of flamingos, horses and incredible bird life – is a unique patch of coast to explore and Van Gogh thought so too. Follow in his footsteps around **Arles**, breaking for a gastronomic lunch at L'Atelier or La Chassagnette before continuing on to gritty **Marseille**.





## Three Weeks Tour de France

Get set in **Strasbourg**, ambling around its cathedral and canal-clad Petite France and dining in a traditional *winstub* (tavern). Then move onto greener climes, picking up the **Route des Vins d'Alsace** (Alsace Wine Route) to tipple your way around the **Massif des Vosges** foothills. But keep a clear head for art nouveau architecture in **Nancy**, where at least one night is obligatory to enjoy romantic place Stanislas lit after dark. End the week in the Champagne cellars of **Épervnay**.

Week two features the pick of Normandy and Brittany: **Bayeux** and its tapestry, the **D-Day landing beaches**, **Mont St-Michel** and **Carnac** in France's Celtic land of legends. Then zoom south for more prehistory in the **Vézère Valley**.

The pace hots up in the third week. From the Dordogne, wiggle through Haut-Languedoc (Upper Languedoc) – through the spectacular **Gorges du Tarn** – to **Avignon** and its vibrant café culture. Slog like a Tour de France cyclist up **Mont Ventoux** then speed north to the majestic city of **Lyon**, from where, should you have another week at hand, a mountain adventure in the **Alps** is a dandy idea.

The last leg takes in wine-rich Burgundy: **Beaune**, **Dijon** and **Vézelay** are the obvious desirable places to stop en route to **Paris**.

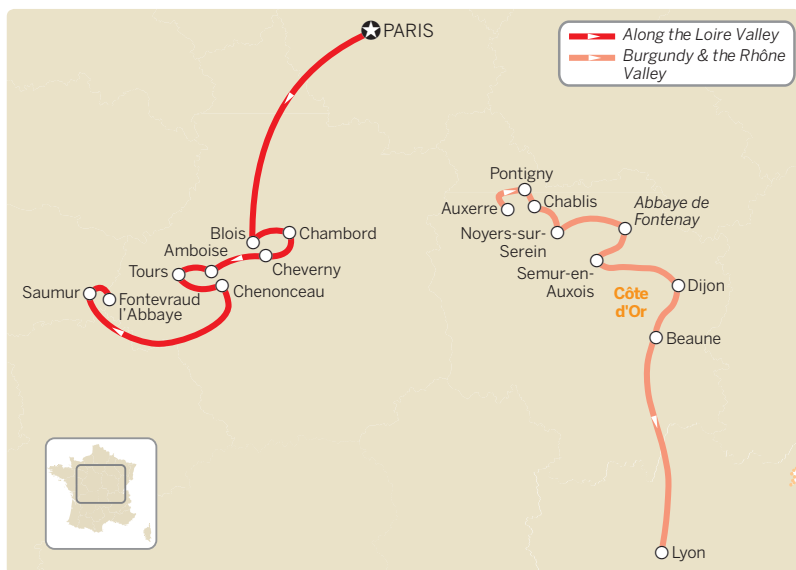


## One Week Brittany to Bordeaux

➤ This trip starts fresh off the boat in **St-Malo**, a walled city with sturdy Vauban ramparts that beg exploration at sunset. Linger at least a day in this gritty port. Walk across at low tide to Île du Grand Bé and lap up great views atop a 14th-century tower in pretty St-Servan. Motor along the **Côte d'Émeraude** the next day, stopping in **Dinard** en route to **Roscoff** 200km west – try to spot local seaweed harvesters around **Sillon de Talbert**. Devote day four to discovering Brittany's famous cider in **Argol** on the **Presqu'île de Crozon**, megaliths around **Carnac**, and a turreted medieval castle in **Josselin**. Push south next along the Atlantic coast, stopping in **Nantes** if you like big cities (and riding mechanical elephants), or continuing to the peaceful waterways of Green Venice, aka the **Marais Poitevin**. **Bordeaux** is your final destination for day six, from where a bevy of Bordeaux wine-tasting trips tempt. End the journey on a high atop Europe's highest sand dune, **Dune du Pilat**, near oyster-famed **Arcachon**.

## One Week A Week Around Paris

➤ Start in **Paris** (see p46 for more days), from where a journey of magnificent French icons, Renaissance châteaux and sparkling wine unfurls. Day one has to be France's grandest castle, **Château de Versailles**, and its vast gardens. The second day, feast on France's best-preserved medieval basilica and dazzling blue stained glass in **Chartres**, an easy train ride away. Small-town **Chantilly** is a good spot to combine a laid-back lunch with Renaissance château, formal French gardens and – if you snagged tickets in advance – an enchanting equestrian performance. Fourth day, catch the train to elegant **Reims** in the heart of the Champagne region. Scale its cathedral for dazzling views before tucking into the serious business of Champagne tasting. Dedicated bubbly aficionados can hop the next day to **Épernay**, France's other great Champagne city. On day six enjoy a lazy start then catch an afternoon fountain show at less crowded **Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte**, followed by a candlelit tour of the château. End the week with a look at futuristic **La Défense** or, for those with kids, **Disneyland**.



### Five Days Along the Loire Valley

From France's soulful capital **Paris** head west to its regal surrounds. First up is the Unesco-hallmarked city of **Blois**, where you can make the most of the limited time you have by hooking up, day two, with an organised châteaux tour: queen of all castles **Château de Chambord** and the charmingly classical **Château de Cheverny**, with its hound-packed kennels, make a great combo. On the third day, continue southwest along France's longest river, the Loire, to **Amboise**, final home of Leonardo da Vinci, and solidly bourgeois **Tours**, from where **Château de Chenonceau**, beautifully strung across the River Cher 34km east, is an easy hop the next morning. End your trip with France's elite riding school in **Saumur** and the movingly simple abbey church **Fontevraud l'Abbaye**. Château de Verrières is a fabulous overnight address in this château-rich neck of the woods.

### Five Days Burgundy & Beyond

Red-wine lovers can enjoy the fruits of Burgundy in this itinerary that begins in the Roman river-port of **Auxerre**, 170km southeast of Paris. Explore its ancient abbey, Gothic cathedral and cycle along towpaths in the afternoon. On day two consider an easy bike ride to Burgundy's last surviving example of Cistercian architecture in pretty **Pontigny**, 25km north. Stay overnight or push on to nearby **Chablis**, where bags more bike rides and gentle hikes between Burgundy vineyards await – allow plenty of time here to taste the seven *grands crus* of this well-known winemaking town. Day four, meander south to the picture-postcard village of **Noyers-sur-Serein**, then head east to the breathtaking, Unesco-listed **Abbaye de Fontenay**, before winding up for the night in **Semur-en-Auxois**, 25km south. On the last day discover **Dijon** and its beautiful medieval and Renaissance buildings. From here, should you have more time, take a road trip through the wine-making area of **Côte d'Or** to **Beaune**, or south to **Lyon** in the Rhône Valley.



## Five Days The French Alps

Warm up with some gentle old-town ambling, lakeside strolling and swimming (in summer) in fairy-tale **Annecy** (just 45km from Geneva, Switzerland). On day two move on to **Chamonix** at the foot of Mont Blanc, Western Europe's highest peak: ride a cable car to the **Aiguille du Midi** or a train to the **Mer de Glace** glacier, or (in winter) ski the legendary **Vallée Blanche**, off-piste all the way. Yet more unforgettable views of the Mont Blanc massif are cooked up on the ski slopes and hiking trails of **St-Gervais** and **Megève**, chic, picturesque Alpine villages. Let the adrenalin rip or push on via **Chambéry** to the **Parc National de la Vanoise**, where spectacular skiing and hiking in **Les Trois Vallées** easily pleases outdoor junkies. A fitting finale to your Alpine foray is the dizzying and staggeringly beautiful drive through **Parc National des Écrins** to **Briançon**, the loveliest of all the medieval villages in the French Alps and famous for its well-preserved Vauban fortifications.

## 10 Days The South of France

Hit the country's hot south in **Nice**, star of the coastline that unfurls in an extravagant pageant of belle époque palaces and celebrity sands. Drive along the French Riviera's trio of legendary **corniches** – the coastal views are mind-blowing – and day three take the train to glitzy **Monaco**. Then move on to the fishing port of **St-Tropez**, where millionaire yachts jostle for space with peddling street artists. Rise early the next morning for the Place des Lices market and frolic away the afternoon on the sand at Plage de Pampelonne. Day six is a toss-up between a dramatic drive along the **Corniche des Maures** to **Bormes-les-Mimosas** and the staggering **Route des Crêtes** mountain pass, or a boat trip to the *très belle* **Îles d'Hyères**. Head inland next to **Aix-en-Provence**, a canvas of graceful 19th-century architecture, stylish cafés and hidden squares. Devote your last two days to the wild **Gorges du Verdon**, Europe's largest canyon, two hour's drive northeast, or the gentler **Luberon** with its bounty of photogenic hilltop villages.



# Travel with Children

## Which Region?

Not sure which bit of France to visit? Here's our pick of regions and their main appeal.

### Sun, Sand & Sea

French Riviera, Côte Vermeille in Roussillon, Corsica, the Atlantic Coast (beware of strong undertows), Brittany or Normandy

### Hiking & Biking

The French Alps, French Basque Country, the Pyrenees, Massif Central, Corsica

### History Lessons

Dordogne (prehistory), Loire Valley (Renaissance), Lille, Flanders and the Somme (WWI), Normandy (WWII)

### Modern Art

Provence, the French Riviera, Côte Vermeille in Roussillon

### Canal Cruising

Languedoc, Burgundy, Loire Valley, the Camargue

Be it kid-friendly extraordinaire capital or rural hinterland, France spoils families with its rich mix of cultural sights, activities and entertainment – some paid-for, many free. To get the most out of travelling *en famille*, plan ahead.

## France for Kids

Once in situ there is no stopping the most zealous of sightseeing, activity-driven families from exploring. France has plenty to suit every age and interest.

## Museums & Monuments

It pays to pick the right one. Most Paris museums organise imaginative *ateliers* (workshops) for children and/or families. Workshops are themed, require advance booking, last 1½ to two hours, and cost €5 to €10 per child. French children have no school Wednesday, meaning most workshops happen Wednesday, weekends and daily during school holidays. Most cater for kids aged seven to 14 years, although in Paris art tours at the Louvre start at four years and at the Musée d'Orsay, five years. Country-wide, check what activity sheets museums and monuments have when buying admission tickets – most have something to keep kids interested. Another winner is to arm your gadget-mad child (aged from six years) with an audioguide.

Savvy parents can find kid appeal in every sight in France, must-sees included. Skip the formal guided tour of Mont St-Michel, for example, and hook up with a walking guide to take you and the kids



barefoot across the sand to the abbey; trade the daytime queues at the Eiffel Tower for a tour after dark with teens; don't dismiss wine tasting in Provence or Burgundy outright – rent bicycles and turn it into a family bike ride instead.

## Outdoor Activities

Once the kids are out of nappies, skiing in the French Alps is the obvious family choice. Ski school **École du Ski Français** ([www.esf.net](http://www.esf.net)) initiates kids in the art of snow plough (group or private lessons, half- or full day) from four years old, and many resorts open their fun-driven *jardins de neige* (snow gardens) to kids from three years old. Families with kids aged under 10 will find smaller resorts like Les Gets, Avoriaz (car-free), La Clusaz, Chamrousse and Le Grand Bornand easier to navigate and better value than larger ski stations. Then, of course, there is all the fun of the fair off-piste: ice skating, sledging, snowshoeing and mushing.

The French Alps and Pyrenees are prime walking areas. Tourist offices have information on easy, well-signposted family walks – or get in touch with a local guide. In Chamonix the cable-car ride and two-hour hike to Lac Blanc followed by a dip in the Alpine lake (p470) is a DIY family favourite; as are the mountain-discovery half-days for ages three to seven, and outdoor-adventure days for ages eight to 12 run by **Cham'Adventure** ([www.cham-adventure.com](http://www.cham-adventure.com)). As with skiing, smaller places like the Parc Naturel Régional du Massif des Bauges (essentially set up for a local French audience) cater much better to young families than the big names everyone knows.

### ADMISSION PRICES

There is no rule on how much and from what age children pay – many museums and monuments are free to under 18 years. Throughout this guide we note the paying price for a child – usually applicable to those aged six years, but in some cases from 12 years and over. In general, you can safely assume kids aged five years and under don't pay (a noteworthy exception is Paris' must-do Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie which costs from two years).

White-water sports and canoeing are doable for children aged seven and older; the French Alps, Provence and Massif Central are key areas. Mountain biking is an outdoor thrill that teens can share – try Morzine.

## Entertainment

France's repertoire is impressive: puppet shows al fresco, children's theatres, children's films at cinemas Wednesday afternoon and weekends, street buskers, illuminated monuments after dark, an abundance of music festivals and so on. A sure winner are the *son et lumière* (sound-and-light) shows projected onto Renaissance châteaux in the Loire Valley and cathedral facades in Rouen, Chartres and Amiens. In Paris, weekly entertainment magazine *L'Officiel des Spectacles* is the key to what's on – or ask at tourist offices.


## Dining Out

French children, accustomed to three-course lunches at school, expect a starter (*entrée*), main course and dessert as their main meal of the day. They know the difference between brie and camembert, and are quite accustomed to eating salad as *entrée*. Main meals tend to be meat 'n' veg or pasta, followed by dessert and/or a slice of cheese; many families end with a square of *chocolate noir* (dark chocolate). Classic French mains loved by children include *gratin dauphinois* (sliced potatoes oven-baked in cream), *escalope de veau* (breaded pan-fried veal) and *boeuf bourguignon* (beef stew). Fondue and *raclette* (melted cheese served with potatoes and cold meats) become favourites from about five years, and *moules frites* (mussels and fries) a couple of years later.

Across the board, children's *menus* (fixed meal at a set price) are common, although anyone in France for more than a few days will soon tire of the ubiquitous spaghetti bolognese or *saucisse* (sausage), or *steak haché* (beef burger) and *frites* (fries) followed by ice cream that most *menus* feature. Don't be shy in asking for a half-portion of an adult main – most restaurants, top-end places included, usually oblige. Ditto in budget and midrange places to ask for a plate of *pâtes au beurre* (pasta with butter) for fussy or very young eaters.

Bread, specifically slices of baguette, accompanies every meal and in restaurants is brought to the table before or immediately

## FAMILY-FRIENDLY RESTAURANTS

Throughout this guide places to eat of particular interest to families are flagged with the icon . This might mean the recommendation has a great children's menu and/or it provides high chairs, changing facilities or paper tablemats for kids to colour in. Or it might have none of these but simply be a great interest grabber for children (like the chefs that hand-pull noodles in front of you at Paris' Les Pâtes Vivantes, or the Jurasien and Alpine farm kitchens where kids collect the eggs that end up on their plate), or pique their culinary curiosity (frogs' legs in Paris, pink nail-sized *tellines* in the Camargue, *moules frites* in Lille).

after you've ordered – to the glee of children who wolf it down while they wait. Watch for the fight to ensue over who gets the *trog-non* (the knobbly end bit, equally a hit with teething babies!).

It is perfectly acceptable to dine *en famille* after dark providing the kids don't run wild. Few restaurants open their doors, however, before 7.30pm or 8pm, making brasseries and cafés – many serve food continuously from 7am or 8am until midnight – more appealing for families with younger children. Many restaurants have high chairs.

France is fabulous snack-attack terrain. Parisian pavements are rife with crêpe stands and wintertime stalls selling hot chestnuts. Sweet and savoury *galettes* (crêpes) make for an easy light lunch, as does France's signature *croque monsieur* (toasted cheese and ham sandwich) served by most cafés and brasseries. *Goûter* (afternoon snack) is golden for every French child and *salons de thé* (tea rooms) serve a mouth-watering array of cakes, pastries and biscuits. Or go local: buy a baguette, rip off a chunk and pop a slab of chocolate inside!

Baby requirements are easily met. The choice of infant formula, soy and cow's milk, nappies (diapers) and jarred baby food in supermarkets and pharmacies is similar to any developed country, although opening hours are more limited (few shops open Sunday). Organic (*bio*) baby food is hard to find.

## Drinks

Buy a fizzy drink for every child sitting at the table and the bill swiftly soars. Opt instead for a free *carafe d'eau* (jug of tap water) with meals and *un sirop* (syrup) in between. Every self-respecting café and bar in France has dozens of flavours to choose from: pomegranate-fuelled grenadine and

pea-green *menthe* (mint) are French-kid favourites, but there's peach, raspberry, cherry, lemon and a rainbow of others to pick from. Syrup is served diluted with water and, best up, costs a good €2 less than a coke. Expect to pay around €1.50 a glass.

## Children's Highlights Gastronomic Moments

- » Fondue and *raclette* in the French Alps
- » Breton crêpes served in a traditional long house encircled by 70 menhirs, Brittany
- » Berthillon ice cream, Île St-Louis, Paris
- » Oysters on an oyster farm, Gujan Mestras, near Bordeaux
- » Grape-juice tasting (while parents taste the alcoholic equivalent), La Balance Mets et Vins, Arbois
- » Snails for breakfast on a snail-farm B&B, Escargot Comtois, the Jura
- » Frogs' legs and a lakeside bike ride, La Bicyclette Bleue, La Dombes
- » Chocolate soup sprinkled with gingerbread croutons, Bistrot et Chocolat, Strasbourg

## Energy Burners

- » Skiing, snowboarding, sledging and dog-mushing (over four years), French Alps and the Pyrenees
- » Scaling Aiguille du Midi by gondola and crossing glaciers into Italy (over four years), Chamonix
- » Around an island by bike (over five years) or parent-pulled bike trailer (over one year), Île de Ré and Île de Porquerolles
- » White-water sports (over seven years), Gorges du Verdon, Gorges du Tarn and Gorges de l'Ardèche
- » Canoeing (over seven years) beneath the Pont du Gard, near Nîmes

» Donkey treks (over 10 years), like Robert Louis Stevenson in the wild Cévennes

## Watching Wildlife

- » Vultures in Parc National des Pyrénées
- » Wolves in Parc National du Mercantour and Parc Animalier des Monts de Guéret
- » Whistling marmots in Chamonix
- » Sharks at Musée Océanographique, Monaco
- » Dancing horses in Saumur, Versailles and Chantilly
- » Bulls and flamingos in the Camargue
- » Storks and kingfishers at Le Teich Parc Ornithologique, near Arcachon
- » Fish (through a snorkelling mask), Île de Porquerolles and Corsica's Porto and Calvi

## Rainy Days

- » Build a house, Bob-style (over three years), Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie, Paris
- » Go Roman (over five years) at Ludo, Pont du Gard, near Nîmes
- » Ride a house-sized, mechanical elephant (any age), Les Machines de l'Île de Nantes, Nantes
- » Learn how planes are built (over six years), Jean Luc Lagardère factory, Toulouse
- » Ogle at skulls (teens), Les Catacombes, Paris
- » Discover V2 rocket technology in a subterranean bunker (teens), La Coupole, St-Omer
- » Play cavemen (any age) in caves riddled with prehistoric art, Vézère Valley
- » Enter wannabe-mechanic heaven (any age), Cité de l'Automobile and Cité du Train, Mulhouse

## Theme Parks

- » Cité de l'Espace (outer space), Toulouse
- » Disneyland, Paris
- » Vulcania (volcanoes), Massif Central

## Planning

### When to Go

Consider the season and what you want to do/see: teen travel is a year-round affair (there's always something to entertain, regardless of the weather), but parents travelling with younger kids will find the dry, pleasantly warm days of spring and early summer best suited to kidding around the park – every town has at least one *terrain de jeux* (playground) – and indulging in other energy-burning, outdoor pursuits.

France's fabulous festival repertoire is another planning consideration (see p20 for a month-by-month listing). Kids of all ages will be particularly enchanted by Avignon's fringe Festival Off, Lyon's Fête des Lumières and Nice Carnival – three freebie events worth planning a trip around.

### Accommodation

In Paris and larger towns and cities, serviced apartments equipped with washing machine and kitchen are suited to families with younger children. Countrywide, hotels with family or four-person rooms can be hard to find – in this guide we flag them with a family-friendly icon (👨👩👧👦) – and need booking in advance. Functional if soul-less chain hotels like Formule 1, found on the

## TOP WEBSITES

- » **Familiscope** ([www.familiscope.fr](http://www.familiscope.fr), in French) Definitive family-holiday planner: endless activity, outing and entertainment listings.
- » **Bienvenue à la Ferme** ([www.bienvenue-a-la-ferme.com/en](http://www.bienvenue-a-la-ferme.com/en)) Cooking courses, animals, nature activities and accommodation on farms France-wide.
- » **Tots2France** ([www.tots2france.co.uk](http://www.tots2france.co.uk)) Self-catering properties vetted by a team of trained mums.
- » **Baby-friendly Boltholes** ([www.babyfriendlyboltholes.co.uk](http://www.babyfriendlyboltholes.co.uk)) 'Stylish escapes – perfect for pre-schoolers' is the strapline of this London-based enterprise specialising in sourcing charming and unique family accommodation.
- » **Baby Goes 2** ([www.babygoes2.com](http://www.babygoes2.com)) Why, where, how-to-go travel guide aimed squarely at families.
- » **Mumsnet** ([www.mumsnet.com](http://www.mumsnet.com)) No question is unanswerable for this UK-based gang of mothers: online discussion, advice, tips, open forum and so on, much of it France-related.

## WHAT TO PACK

### Babies & Toddlers

- ☐ A front or back sling for baby and toddler: France's cobbled streets, metro stairs and hilltop villages were not built with pushchairs (strollers) in mind. Several must-see museums, moreover, notably Château de Versailles, don't let pushchairs in.
- ☐ A portable changing mat, handwash gel etc (baby-changing facilities are a rarity)
- ☐ A canvas screw-on seat for toddlers (not many restaurants have high chairs)
- ☐ Kids' car seats: rental companies rent them but at proportionately extortionate rates. In France children under 10 years or less than 1.40m in height must, by law, be strapped in an appropriate car seat.

### Six to 12 Years


- ☐ Binoculars for young explorers to zoom in on wildlife, sculpted cathedral facades, stained-glass windows etc
- ☐ A pocket video camera (such as Flip) to inject fun into 'boring' grown-up activities
- ☐ Activity books, sketchpad and pens, travel journal and kid-sized day pack
- ☐ Fold-away micro scooter and/or rollerblades if you're doing lots of city walking
- ☐ Kite (for beaches)

### Teens

- ☐ France-related iPhone apps
- ☐ French phrasebook
- ☐ Mask, snorkel and flippers

outskirts of most large towns, always have a generous quota of family rooms and make convenient overnight stops for motorists driving from continental Europe or the UK (Troyes is a popular stopover for Brits en route to the Alps). Parents with just one child and/or a baby in tow will have no problem finding hotel accommodation – most midrange hotels have baby cots and are happy to put a child's bed in a double room for a minimal extra cost.

In rural France, family-friendly B&Bs and *fermes auberges*, some of which cook up tasty evening meals, are the way to go. Bring a baby monitor so little children can sleep sweet upstairs while mum and dad wine and dine in peace downstairs. Or

what about a hip baby-and-toddler house party in a château in Burgundy or a chalet retreat in the French Alps? For older children, tree houses decked out with bunk beds and Mongolian yurts create a real family adventure. Dozens of family-friendly places are recommended throughout this guide – look for the  icon.

Camping is huge with French families: check into a self-catering mobile home, wooden chalet or family tent; sit back on the verandah with glass of wine in hand and watch as your kids – wonderfully oblivious to any barriers language might pose – run around with new-found French friends. Campgrounds require booking well in advance, especially during high season.

# regions at a glance



## Paris

**Food** ✓✓✓

**Art** ✓✓✓

**Shopping** ✓✓✓

### Gourmet Paradise

Monsieur A Boulanger opened the city's first restaurant, near rue Rivoli, in 1765. Contemporary Parisian dining is an exuberant feast of neighbourhood bistros, old-time brasseries, zinc-bar cafés and starred restaurants.

### Museums & Galleries

All the great masters star in Paris' extraordinary portfolio of museums. Not all the booty is stashed inside: buildings, metro stations, parks and other public art give *Mona* a good run for her money.

### Fashion & Flea Markets

Luxury fashion houses, edgy boutiques, Left Bank designer-vintage and Europe's largest flea market: Paris really is the last word in fabulous shopping.



## Around Paris

**Châteaux** ✓✓✓

**Cathedrals** ✓✓✓

**Green Spaces** ✓



## Lille, Flanders & the Somme

**Architecture** ✓✓✓

**History** ✓✓✓

**Coastline** ✓✓✓

### A Taste of Royalty

Château de Versailles – vast, opulent and *very* shimmery – has to be seen to be believed. Fontainebleau, Chantilly and Vaux-le-Vicomte are other fabled addresses in French royalty's little black book.

### Sacred Architecture

The other heavy-weight near Paris is Chartres cathedral, one of Western architecture's greatest achievements, with stained glass in awesome blue.

### Paris' Lungs

Parisians take air in thick forests outside the city: Forêt de Fontainebleau, old royal hunting ground, is a hot spot for rock climbing and family walks. Chantilly means manicured French gardens and upper-class horse racing.

### Flemish Style

Breaking for a glass of strong local beer between old-town meanders around extravagant Flemish Renaissance buildings is a highlight of northern France. Lille and Arras are the cities to target.

### Gothic to WWI

Amiens evokes serene contemplation inside one of France's most awe-inspiring Gothic cathedrals, and emotional encounters in WWI cemeteries.

### Coastal Capers

Hiking along the Côte d'Opale – a wind-buffed area of white cliff, gold sand and ever-changing sea and sky – is dramatic and beautiful, as is a Baie de Somme bicycle ride past lounging seals.

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## Normandy

**Food** ✓✓  
**Coastline** ✓✓✓  
**Battlefields** ✓✓✓

### Calvados & Camembert

This coastal chunk of northern France is a pastoral land of butter and soft cheeses. Its exotic fruits: camembert, cider, fiery apple brandy and super-fresh seafood.

### Cliffs & Coves

Chalk-white cliff to dune-lined beach, rock spire to pebble cove, coastal path to tide-splashed island-abbey Mont St-Michel: few coastlines are as inspiring.

### D-Day Beaches

Normandy has long played a pivotal role in European history. But it was during WWII's D-Day landings that Normandy leaped to global importance. Museums, memorials, cemeteries and endless stretches of soft golden sand evoke that dramatic day in 1944.

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## Brittany

**Food** ✓✓  
**Walking** ✓✓✓  
**Islands** ✓✓

### Crêpes & Cider

These two Breton culinary staples are no secret but who cares? Devouring caramel-doused buckwheat pancakes in the company of homemade cider is a big reason to visit Brittany.

### Wild Hikes

With its wild dramatic coastline, islands, medieval towns and thick Celtic forests laced in local lore and legend, this proud and fiercely independent region promises exhilarating walks.

### Breton Beauties

Brittany's much-loved islands, dotted in black sheep and crossed with craggy coastal paths and windswept cycling tracks, are big draws. Don't miss dramatic Île d'Ouessant or the very aptly named Belle Île.

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## Champagne

**Champagne** ✓✓✓  
**Walking** ✓✓  
**Drives** ✓✓✓

### Bubbly Tasting

Gawp at a Champagne panorama from atop Rheims' cathedral then zoom in close with serious tasting at the world's most prestigious Champagne houses in Rheims and Épernay.

### Vineyard Trails

Nothing quite fulfils the French dream like easy day hikes through neat rows of vineyards, exquisite picture-postcard villages bedecked in flowers and a gold-stone riverside hamlet right out of a Renoir painting.

### Majestic Motoring

No routes are more geared to motorists and cyclists than the Champagne Routes, fabulously picturesque and well-signposted driving itineraries taking in the region's wealthy winemaking villages, hillside vines and traditional cellars.

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## Alsace & Lorraine

**Battlefields** ✓✓✓  
**City Life** ✓✓  
**Villages** ✓✓✓

### Emotional Journeys

Surveying the dazzling symmetry of crosses on the Verdun battlefields is painful. Memorials, museums, cemeteries, forts and an ossuary mark out the emotional journey.

### Urban Icons

With the sublime (Strasbourg's cathedral) to the space-age (the new Centre Pompidou in Metz), this northeast chunk of France steals urbanite hearts with its city squares, architecture, museums and Alsatian dining.

### Chocolate-box Villages

There is no lovelier way of acquainting oneself with this part of France than travelling from hill-top castles to stork-nest-blessed farms, to half-timbered villages framed by vines.

**p301**



## The Loire Valley

**Châteaux** ✓✓✓  
**History** ✓✓✓  
**Cycling** ✓✓

### Royal Architecture

Endowed with dazzling structural and decorative gems from medieval to Renaissance and beyond, the Loire's lavish châteaux sweep most visitors off their feet.

### Tempestuous Tales

This region is a dramatic story teller: through spectacular castles, fortresses, apocalyptic tapestries and court paintings, the gore and glory, political intrigue and sex scandals of medieval and Renaissance France fabulously unfolds.

### Riverside Trails

The River Loire is France's longest, best-decorated river. Pedalling riverside along the flat from château to château is one of the valley's great joys.

**p349**



## Burgundy

**Wine** ✓✓✓  
**History** ✓✓✓  
**Activities** ✓✓

### Reds & Whites

Mooch between vines and old-stone villages along Burgundy's *grand cru* wine route. But this region is not just about Côte d'Or reds. Taste whites in Chablis and Mâcon.

### Medieval History

Nowhere is Burgundy's past as one of medieval Europe's mightiest states evoked more keenly than in the dashingly handsome capital Dijon. Complete the medieval history tour with abbeys Cluny and Cîteaux.

### Great Outdoors

Hiking and biking past vineyards or cruising in a canal boat is the good life. Pedal the tow-path to gloriously medieval Abbaye de Fontenay, open a bottle of Chablis and savour the best of Burgundy.

**p390**



## Lyon & the Rhône Valley

**Food** ✓✓✓  
**Roman Sites** ✓✓  
**Cycling** ✓

### Famous Flavours

No city in France excites taste buds more than Lyon. Savour local specialities in a checked-tablecloth *bouchon* (Lyonnais bistro).

### Roman Remains

Not content with lavishing two majestic amphitheatres on Lyon (catch a concert alfresco after dark during Les Nuits de Fourvière – magical!), the Romans gifted the Rhône Valley with a third in jazz-famed Vienne.

### Two-wheel Touring

Pedalling between vineyards in Beaujolais country or around frog-filled lakes swamped with bird life in Les Dombes is one of life's simple pleasures.

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## French Alps & the Jura Mountains

**Food** ✓✓  
**Outdoors** ✓✓✓  
**Farmstays** ✓✓✓

### Culture & Cuisine

Fondue is the tip of the culinary iceberg in this Alpine region, where cow's milk flavours dozens of cheeses. Around chic Lake Annecy chefs woo with wild herbs and lake perch.

### Adrenalin Rush

Crowned by Mont Blanc (4810m), the French Alps show no mercy in their insanely challenging ski trails, mountain-bike descents and bike rides. Did we mention Europe's longest black downhill piste?

### Back to Nature

Feel the humble rhythm of the land with an overnight stay on a farm. Bottle-feed calves, collect the eggs, have breakfast in a fragrant garden or before a wood-burning stove, and feel right at home.

**p461**



## Massif Central

**Volcanoes** ✓✓✓  
**Architecture** ✓  
**Activities** ✓✓

### Volcanoes

The last one erupted in 5000 BC but their presence remains felt: mineral waters bubble up from volcanic springs in Vichy and Volvic; volcanic stone paints Clermont-Ferrand black and there's the razzmatazz of Vulcania.

### Belle Époque

A string of early 20th-century spa towns including Vichy add a string of understated elegance to this region's otherwise deeply provincial bow.

### Hiking & Skiing

Walking is the best way to explore this unique landscape – an uncanny, grass-green moonscape of giant molehills crossed with trails. Then there are the little-known ski slopes of Le Mont-Dore.

**p521**



## Limousin, the Dordogne & the Lot

**Food** ✓✓✓  
**Hilltop Towns** ✓✓  
**Cruises** ✓✓✓

### Mouth-watering Markets

Black truffles, foie gras and walnuts... Gourmets, eat your heart out in this fertile part of central and southwest France, where the fruits of the land are piled high at a bevy of atmospheric weekly markets.

### Mighty Bastides

Not only is Dordogne's prized collection of fortified 13th-century towns and villages a joy to explore, valley views from the top of these cliff-top *bastides* are uplifting. Start with Monpazier and Domme.

### Meandering Waterways

Be it aboard a canoe, raft or traditional flat-bottomed *gabarre*, cruising quietly along the region's rivers is an invitation to see *la belle France* at her most serene.

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## Atlantic Coast

**Port Towns** ✓✓  
**Wine** ✓✓✓  
**Activities** ✓✓✓

### Sea View

Hip dining rendezvous in an old banana-ripening warehouse in Nantes, limestone arcades and islands in La Rochelle, and brilliant art museums in wine-rich Bordeaux.

### Wonderful Wines

France's largest winegrowing region, Bordeaux encompasses the Médoc with its magnificent châteaux and medieval hamlet of St-Émilion. The wine is wonderful (not to mention the Cognac).

### Rural Retreats

Paddling emerald-green waterways in the Marais Poitevin, pedalling sun-baked Île de Re and wandering between weathered, wooden oyster shacks in Arcachon Bay is what this tranquil region is all about – slowing the pace right down.

**p594**



## French Basque Country

**Food** ✓✓  
**Activities** ✓✓✓  
**Culture** ✓✓✓

### Culture & Cuisine

Independent and Catalan in soul, this exuberant region beneath the mist-soaked Pyrenees evokes Spain with its fiestas, bullfights, traditional *pelota* (ball games), tapas and famous Bayonne ham.

### Surf's Up

Riding waves in the glitzy beach resort of Biarritz or on surfer beaches in Les Landes is good reason to visit this sun-slicked coastal region, snug in France's most southwest corner.

### A Timeless Pilgrimage

For centuries pilgrims have made their way across France to the quaint walled town of St-Jean Pied de Port, just across the border from Santiago de Compostela in Spain. Do the same, on foot or by bicycle.

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## The Pyrenees

**Outdoors** ✓✓✓  
**Scenery** ✓✓✓  
**History** ✓✓

### Adrenalin Rush

Make Parc National des Pyrénées your playground. Vigorous hikes to lofty heights, good-value downhill skiing and racy white-water sports will leave you wanting more.

### Jaw-dropping Views

France's last wilderness has rare flora and fauna, snow-kissed peaks, vulture-speckled skies, waterfalls and lakes. Top views include those from Pic du Jer, Pic du Midi, Lescun, Cirque de Gavarnie, Lac de Gaube and pretty much every valley going.

### Rare & Holy Cities

That same elegance that saw well-to-do 19th-century English and Americans winter in Pau still attracts guests today. Then there is sacred Lourdes, a provincial pilgrim city.

**p659**



## Toulouse Area

**Food** ✓✓  
**History** ✓✓✓  
**Cruises** ✓✓

### Cassoulet & Armagnac

Try Emile restaurant for Toulouse's best *cassoulet*, though this classic bean-stew dish simmers on the stove in most kitchens. Begin the experience with an aperitif and end with an Armagnac brandy.

### Towns with Tales

Red-brick Toulouse's historic mansions, quintessential fortified town Montauban, Gothic Albi, Moissac's Romanesque abbey: this compact region is packed with historical tales and historic architecture.

### Canal du Midi

Pop a cork out of a bottle of Vin de Pays d'Oc and savour the go-slow, lush-green loveliness of the Canal du Midi. Stroll or pedal its towpaths, soak in a spa or simply rent a canal boat and drift.

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## Languedoc-Roussillon

**Culture** ✓✓  
**Roman Sites** ✓✓  
**Activities** ✓✓

### So Near Spain

Roussillon is a hot, dusty, lively region, long part of Catalonia at the eastern end of the Pyrenees. Celebrate a Catalan fiesta in Perpignan, and modern art and *sardane* folk dances in Céret.

### Aqueducts & Amphitheatres

Nîmes amphitheatre and the gracefully arched Pont du Gard are two of the Roman Empire's best-preserved sites.

### Footpaths & Waterways

Try canoeing beneath the Pont du Gard, biking towpaths to Carcassonne, boating the Canal du Midi, climbing up to Cathar fortresses, donkey trekking in the Cévennes or hiking gorges in Haut-Languedoc.

**p704**



## Provence

**Food** ✓✓✓  
**Villages** ✓✓✓  
**Modern Art** ✓✓✓

### Eating & Drinking

Sip pastis over *pétanque*, spend all evening savouring *bouillabaisse* (fish stew), mingle over buckets of herbs and marinated olives at the market, hunt truffles, and taste Bagnol reds and Côtes de Provence rosé.

### Sensual Sauntering

Travelling à la *Provençal* is a sensual journey past scented lavender fields and chestnut forests, through apple-green vineyards and silvery olive groves, around markets, chapels, and medieval villages perched on rocky crags.

### Avant-garde

Provence is an art museum and has the roll-call to prove it: Matisse, Renoir, Picasso, Cézanne, Van Gogh and Signac all painted and lived here.

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## The French Riviera & Monaco

**Resorts** ✓✓✓  
**Glamour** ✓✓✓  
**Coastline** ✓✓✓

### Coastal Queen

Urban grit, old-world opulence, art that moves and a seaside promenade everyone loves – Nice, queen of the French Riviera, will always be belle of the seaside ball.

### Party Time

Enjoy the Riviera high life: trail film stars in Cannes, see Formula One meet high society in Monaco, guzzle champers in St-Tropez, frolic in famous footsteps on sandy beaches, dine between priceless art, dance til dawn...

### Magnificent Scenery

With its glistening sea, idyllic beaches and coastal paths, this part of the Med coast begs wonderful walks. Cicadas sing on Cap Ferrat, while the sun turns the Massif de l'Estérel brilliant red.

**p817**



## Corsica

**Coastal Towns** ✓✓✓  
**Hiking** ✓✓✓  
**Boat Trips** ✓✓✓

### Postcard Home

Corsican coastal towns are impossibly picturesque: alley-woven Bastia, Italianate Bonifacio, celeb-loved Île Rousse, chichi Calvi... every one calls for a postcard home.

### Great Outdoors

Hiking high-altitude mountain trails once the preserve of bandits and *bergers* (shepherds) is a trail-junkie favourite, as are the cliffhanging Gorges de Spelunca and beautiful pink, ochre and ginger Les Calanques.

### The Big Blue

Nowhere does the Med seem bluer. Hop on deck in Porto, Bonifacio, Calvi or Porto-Vecchio for a boat excursion or view sapphire waters through a mask while diving and snorkelling.

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